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October 29, 2009

The Honorable Kathleen Sebelius
Secretary
United States Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20201

Dear Secretary Sebelius:

It has come to my attention that the 2010 proposed Physician Fee Schedule proposal from the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) includes several provisions to reduce reimbursement rates for specialty doctors, such as cardiologists and radiologists, in order to increase payment rates for primary care physicians. Several cardiology and radiology practices in the 4th Congressional District of Minnesota have contacted me regarding these proposed cuts. I strongly support the much needed emphasis on primary care, but do not believe that it should come at the expense of specialty services that patients need.

The proposed cuts stem from the Physician Practice Information (PPI) Survey to determine the practice expense portion of cardiology and radiology payments. The conclusions drawn from the survey completed in 2008 found the cost associated with providing these specialty services has dropped drastically in the past five years. I am concerned that the conclusions reached with the survey included a data set and sample size that is not representative of the actual cost of practice in Minnesota. Assurances must be made that they survey data is correct before changes are made to the fee schedule that will effect access to specialty care for patients in Minnesota. I respectfully ask that CMS review the survey results and refrain from instituting these cuts until a more transparent survey is administered.

Minnesota has made significant progress in improving the lives of individuals with heart disease and other chronic conditions through a coordinated delivery system. Nationally, heart related mortality has decreased by 30 percent in the past few years, due in large part to improvements in imaging technology which have lead to faster diagnosis and increased survival rates. Minnesota has the lowest overall heart disease mortality rate in the United States, and has shown the fastest decline from 1994 to 2004. The success of Minnesota's health care delivery system is a testament to the coordination of care between primary care and specialty care physicians, both of which are necessary to ensure effective care for patients.

I hope that the final CMS proposal will take these concerns into account. I look forward to working with you on this critical issue.

Sincerely,

Betty McCollum
Member of Congress